

Cibolo now well along the road to being an entertainment capital

By Madison Iszler STAFF WRITER



Photos by Billy Calzada / Staff photographer

Workers are getting the Santikos Entertainment Center into shape for a projected May opening. It will have 87,000 square feet of space and include laser tag, bowling, a movie theater and arcade.

As Santikos Entertainment's complex in Cibolo gets closer to opening, an amusement showdown is inevitable as development along the Interstate 35 stretch between San Antonio and New Braunfels heats up.

The San Antonio company gave a tour of its 87,700-square-foot colossus Tuesday, which is expected to open in May.

Just across the street, San Marcos-based EVO Entertainment Group is opening its new 73,000-square-foot multiplex this week.

The Santikos complex will offer reclining seats in front of a dozen movie screens, two of which are in the company's AVX format, with bigger screens, digital projection and surround sound.



Andrew Brooks, director of marketing for Santikos Entertainment, shows a projection base in a movie theater.

If customers don't want to catch a film, they can hurl bowling balls down 16 lanes, several of which flash interactive graphics, or play games at the arcade, in a split-level laser tag room or inside a multi-player virtual-reality arena.

A live-music venue no longer is part of the project, but there will be patio space for events and gatherings. Hungry patrons can chow on pizza, wings, sandwiches and burgers, or grab a drink at the full bar.

The project is Santikos' second venture focused on an assortment of amusement offerings, as the company

competes with other chains as well as people's couches and living rooms. Santikos opened the Casa Blanca film and bowling megaplex on San Antonio's far West Side in 2016.

The Cibolo complex will be a one-stop shop for movies, games and food, activities that are community-oriented, said Andrew Brooks, Santikos' director of strategy and innovation.

"This whole development's going to be a destination for all the surrounding communities," he said.

When people walk in the facility's door, the company wants them to feel immersed in entertainment options — "to forget reality and just have some fun," said Daniel Fonseca, Santikos' gaming manager.

The project anchors the Cibolo Crossing development, which will feature retail and office components along with apartments. There's 340,000 square feet of retail space around the Santikos center, along with 100,000 square feet of office and hospitality space.

Much of the retail space is spoken for, and tenants will be announced in the next few months, said Jonathan Collins, CCIM at Valcor, which is handling the leasing for Cibolo Crossing.

It's focused on entertainment, service and restaurants. Fasken Oil and Ranch, the developer, is "not doing a big power center Amazon's going to compete with," Collins said.

EVO's 73,000-square-foot multiplex also features bowling lanes, an arcade, laser tag and virtual reality experiences. The project has 10 screens and two EVX auditoriums, EVO's version of IMAX. Visitors can summon a server from their recliners, and order food, snacks and beer.

"We're an entertainment company, not a movie theater company," EVO chief executive Mitchell Roberts said.

The complex is part of the Wiederstein Ranch retail development in Schertz. Five Star Development recently backed out of the project, which affects EVO's plans for a 15,000-seat amphitheater, Roberts said. The firm would still like to build it, but plans have been paused. Abiso Development has taken over the project, Roberts said.

Both companies say their unique approach will stand out to guests.

"Our focus is on doing what we do best: offering our guests an incredible time and service," Roberts said.

Santikos' business model is centered around the community, patrons' experience and John Santikos' legacy, Brooks said. John Santikos ran the company founded by his late father, Louis Santikos, until his death in 2014.

"We're going to let (the model) speak for itself when we open the doors, and this community'll get to pick," Brooks said. madison.iszler@express-news.net